

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9187

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY THERAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 6524

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, AF, PK

SUBJ: PUSHTUNISTAN DAY

REF: ISLAMABAD 9183

1. SUMMARY: PUSHTUNISTAN DAY, AN AFGHAN NATIONAL HOLIDAY CELEBRATED ANNUALLY ON AUGUST 31, HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN OCCASION FOR GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN TO CRITICIZE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT'S TREATMENT OF ITS PUSHTUN AND BALUCH MINORITIES. THIS YEAR, HOWEVER, WHILE FORMAT AND KEY SPEAKERS (INCLUDING AJMAL KHATTACK) IN CEREMONIES UNCHANGED, PUBLIC STATEMENTS REFLECTED IMPROVEMENT IN PAK/AFGHAN RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. PUSHTUNISTAN DAY IS AN AFGHAN NATIONAL HOLIDAY CELEBRATED AUGUST 31. IN RECENT PAST THIS HAS BEEN OCCASION FOR AFGHANS TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR CULTURAL AFFINITY WITH THEIR PUSHTUN "BRETHERN" IN PAKISTAN AND TO CRITICIZE PAKISTANI GOVERNMENT FOR ITS TREATMENT OF MINORITIES. THE FORMAT FOR PUBLIC CEREMONIES THIS YEAR WAS IDENTICAL TO LAST YEAR'S. CEREMONIES BEGAN WITH SPEECH BY KABUL MAYOR NURZAD.

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WHERE LAST YEAR HIS SPEECH WAS DEVOTED TO RECITATION

OF DAOUD'S THEN STANDARD ANTI-PAK PROANNOUNCEMENT, THIS YEAR NURZAD PRAISED THE RECENT DAOUD/BHUTTO MEETINGS AS SOLVING PROBLEMS IN A RATIONAL WAY.

3. AJMAL KHATTAK, EXILED FORMER SECRETARY GENERAL OF PAKISTAN'S NATIONAL AWAMI PARTY, FOLLOWED NURZAD TO THE PODIUM, AS HE DID IN 1975. HIS SPEECH WAS ALSO MUTED COMPARED TO PAST STATEMENTS AND HE SPOKE OF HIS HOPES FOR A "PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF OUR NATIONAL PROBLEM."

4. WHILE PUBLIC STATEMENTS WERE NON-INFLAMMATORY, FANFARE GIVEN CELEBRATION WAS CONSIDERABLE. DAOUD'S BROTHER NAIM AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTERS SHARQ AND ABDULILAH ATTENDED EVENT ALONG WITH MOST OF THE CABINET (KHATTAK THANKED DAOUD FOR ATTENDING THE EVENT, BUT NONE OF OUR SOURCES REPORT HAVING SEEN DAOUD THERE)

FRONTIERS AFFAIRS MINISTER FAIZ MOHAMMAD APPEARED AT THE CEREMONY IN FULL TRIBAL GARB. WHILE NO PAPERS WERE PUBLISHED AUGUST 31 BECAUSE OF HOLIDAY, KABUL TIMES AUGUST 30 HAD ONE FOURTH PAGE COLOR PRINT OF PUSHTUNISTAN FLAG ON FRONT PAGE AS IS CUSTOMARY. HOWEVER, IT FEATURED EXCERPTS FROM DAOUD STATEMENTS ON FOREIGN POLICY WHICH DID NOT ONCE MENTION PAKISTAN OR PUSHTUNISTAN. THIS CONTRASTS SHARPLY WITH LAST YEAR'S COVERAGE ON SAME DAY WHICH FEATURED EXCERPTS ONLY ON SUBJECT OF PUSHTUNISTAN. FRONT PAGE THIS YEAR ALSO HAS SHORT ARTICLE ATTRIBUTED TO BBC ON RELEASE OF ABDUL GHAFAR KHAN FROM PRISON. EDITORIAL INSIDE TITLED "PUSHTUNISTAN DAY" CARRIES OPTIMISTIC STATEMENT: QUOTE: WE ARE CONVINCED THAT BY PURSUING THE CAUSE OF REMOVING FRICTION BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES WITH THE SPIRIT THAT CURRENTLY PREVAILS, WE WILL SUCCEED IN ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KIND OF RELATIONS THAT OUR TWO BROTHER NATIONS SHOULD HAVE. END QUOTE.

5. COMMENT: IT APPEARS TO US THAT AFGHANS HAVE TAKEN PAINS TO KEEP PUSHTUNISTAN DAY FROM UPSETTING ATMOS-
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PHASE FOR FURTHER DAOUD-BHUTTO TALKS. KHATTAK'S SPEECH WAS PARTICULARLY MILD IN COMPARISON TO HIS PREVIOUS PUSHTUNISTAN DAY ADDRESSES. ABSENCE OF DAOUD STATEMENT ON PUSHTUNISTAN IS ALSO ENCOURAGING SINCE, AS HIS COLOMBO INTERVIEW INDICATES (PARA 4 REFTTEL) HE IS STILL LOCKED IN TO SOME TRADITIONAL POSITIONS, SUCH AS NAP PARTICIPATION, THE MENTION OF WHICH CAN ONLY RANKLE PAKS.

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